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RHFMISS/AFSOUTH NAPLES IT PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR TF FALCON PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEPGEA/CDR650THMIGP SHAPE BE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: EDUCATION ISSUES LEAD TO POLITICAL FERMENT
IN BOSNIAK COMMUNITY

REF: 08 PRISTINA 592

Classified By: Ambassador Tina S. Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. The issue of access to higher education in Serbian universities has evoked a strong political reaction from Kosovo's Bosniak community. Widespread unhappiness over the handling of education issues by Bosniak political representatives in Pristina has led to the formation of a new Kosovo Bosniak political party. Newly-emerging community leaders are actively engaging the international community and seeking assistance. While the status of 2008's Bosniak high school graduates has been settled, community leaders are seeking a long-term solution to the issue of acceptance of their diplomas by Serbian universities, and the ICO has stepped in to help craft one. For its part, the Kosovo Bosniak VAKAT party has been caught flat footed and is now trying to repair its image, albeit in an unconvincing manner. We welcome a more vigorous Bosniak political representation and will work to encourage it. END SUMMARY.

The Importance of Education

12. (C) On January 29, a wide-ranging group of Kosovo Bosniak community leaders hosted a lunch organized to thank the Embassy for its intervention in the issue of diplomas issued to Bosniak high school graduates (see reftel for details). With the strong support of others gathered for the event, Raman Idrizi, a prominent Bosniak businessman, explained that education is the community's top priority, with the issue of continued access to the Serbian higher education system the most critical aspect. Idrizi and others told us that for reasons of language (Kosovo Bosniaks speak Serbo-Croatian), quality, and tradition, Bosniak graduates have no viable options for higher education outside of the Serbian state system. (Note: A majority of Kosovo's Bosniaks, as residents of what was a province of Serbia, have always sought to complete higher education in the Serbian system. At present, most Bosniak university students attend the Serbian government-run University of Pristina in Mitrovica and the Serbian university in Muslim-majority Novi Pazar (in Serbia) or other state institutions in Serbia. End Note.).

New Party

13. (C) The community's strong concern for its children's

educational prospects is matched by growing dissatisfaction with its political representatives in Pristina, in particular the Kosovo Bosniak VAKAT party, led by Dzezair Murati and Sadik Idrizi (reftel), who largely ignored concerns over diplomas and, at one point, worked actively to suppress complaints about the issue. We have been hearing over the past several months that support for an alternative party has been growing. This came to fruition on February 7 in Prizren, when the Kosovo Bosniak New Democratic Party (NDP) held its founding assembly. At our January 29 meeting, Emilija Rexhepi, now NDP party president, spoke about the group's main political goal of securing all three Bosniak set-aside seats in the Kosovo parliament in the next general election. Economist Zulji Abdirahman told us that the new party's strong backing in the Prizren region (where 70-80 percent of Kosovo Bosniaks live) had struck fear into VAKAT leaders, who were now using loyalists to monitor meetings and movements of the new party's leadership. (Note: we were followed and observed by several Bosniaks known to us as VAKAT members during our meetings in Prizren municipality on January 29.)

Engaging the International Community

14. (C) Rexhepi told us that she had already engaged the National Democratic Institute (NDI) office in Pristina, seeking its assistance in developing the NDP. She and a group of concerned educators and parents met ICO representatives on February 2 to discuss the issue of education. Bosniak leaders are concerned that the end of the 2008-2009 school year in May will bring a repeat of

PRISTINA 00000056 002 OF 002

last-year's diploma problems. ICO reported on February 6 that the Bosniak community would identify all Bosniak students seeking to enter Serbian universities (at all levels) within the coming weeks. ICO has suggested that the same solution found this past year -- the continued use of UNMIK stamps on high school diplomas issued in Kosovo Bosniak schools -- be applied until more satisfactory arrangements have been found, and the Bosniak community has agreed. (See reftel for more information concerning the UNMIK stamp).

VAKAT: Out of Touch, Short of Cash?

15. (C) We met also with VAKAT on February 4 to gauge their reaction to recent developments. Party leader and Kosovo MP Dzezair Murati spent much of the meeting suggesting that various "conspiracies" were responsible for the party's fading fortunes. He also avoided direct discussion on the topic of the new political party, although he said that VAKAT would continue to "fight" for Bosniak rights. VAKAT may also be running low on funds. Murati makes an annual fundraising trip to Switzerland, home to a sizable Kosovo Bosniak diaspora, where he visits Bosniak social clubs and other organizations. We have been told by our Bosniak contacts that Murati's most recent trip in December 2008 was largely unsuccessful, with many Swiss Bosniak leaders refusing to meet with him due to VAKAT's behavior concerning the diploma issue.

Comment:

16. (C) Education is an issue that has evoked a deep reaction in the Bosniak community as a matter of ethnic identity and survival. VAKAT made a foolish political blunder in not dealing with this problem, and threatening those who wanted to find a solution only exacerbated VAKAT's ineptitude. Its leaders now appear within the Bosniak community as out-of-touch politicians seeking to reassure a constituency which they have too long taken for granted. This illustrates the ever-present danger of set-aside parliamentary seats for minority groups that small cliques may capture to be used for their personal benefit. In this case, misuse of the set-aside seats is motivating the Bosniak community to unite around a new movement that is more broadly representative of

its concerns than the current leadership.

17. (C) We are encouraged by the flexibility shown by the ICO and Bosniak community leaders in addressing educational issues. The continued use of UNMIK stamps is an effective, low-profile, and minimalist solution to the problem. Serbian officials have accepted UNMIK-stamped diplomas as sufficient for entry into Serbian universities, and the relatively small number of Bosniak graduates each year means that the issue will not draw undue publicity or political pressure for the continued exercise of an UNMIK function. We also reiterate that the stamps are under the direct control of school administrators -- not UNMIK. We continue to partner with ICO in addressing the issue of non-Albanian communities' education under the Ahtisaari plan.

KAIDANOW